

Learners' Demographic Profiles and Attitude towards the Learners of Open School at Bangladesh Open University, A Study.

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'Formal Education
Open Schooling

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is one of the developing countries in the world. The total population of Bangladesh is near about 156 million and expectancy of life is only 60 years. The bureau of statistics calculates the present per capita income in Bangladesh at US\$ 690 (1US\$=70BDT). To enhance development and continuation of its development, there should be fulfilling the fundamental needs for every citizen of the country in time. Illiteracy is considered to be one of the important parameters causing socio-economic backwardness. Illiteracy minimizes skill manpower and lack of educational infrastructure minimizes human resource (Numan, 2001).

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the only public institution in the country that offered education in distance and flexible mode. This university is to increase access to education and training in the fields of basic education, secondary education, and vocational education, strengthens formal and non-formal education programs for the general population. BOU launched Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) programs in 1995 and 1998 respectively through Open School (OS). OS emphasis the printed text materials for the learners where can accept easily and comfortably. To understand the difficult lessons of the text audio-visual programs have been developed. Study revealed that the use of media i.e. audio and video can strengthen the formal method of classroom teaching (James 1986; Islam and Islam 2003).

BOU's main objective is to provide need based education to the deprived and disadvantaged group especially women and people of rural/remote areas, working people and dropped out learner those who are unable to join the conventional education. It provides opportunities of education to all classes of people and creates efficient manpower by improving the quality of education. The response to BOU programs is so phenomenal that current enrolment of learners (289,791) is several folds higher than that of total enrolment in all public and private universities in the country. Thus BOU is emerged as a new member of the mega-universities (Daniel, 1996; Islam et.al, 2006). In several studies, it has been found that BOU education is flexible, cost-effective and comparable standard to the conventional universities (Anonymous, 2002; Islam and Selim, 2006). To provide learner support services BOU has a network of 12 regional resource centers (RRC), 80 local centers (LC) and More than 1300 study centers (SC) all over the country.

Now a days teaching is not teachers centered, it is learners centered. Distance education can be more learners centered if distance educators are aware of the problems, needs, attitudes and characteristics of their learners. The present study tried to reflect the learners' demographic status and attitudes towards their tutorial session and the audio-video media those are broadcasting along with the formal programs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out amongst the randomly selected tutorial centers and learners of OS of the BOU during the period of August 2009 to December 2009. A cross-sectional study design was used. The entire list of 223108 learners of OS served as sampling frame and the sample size of this study was 614. All respondents were sub grouped proportionately where 50.5% were from SSC program and 49.5% were taken from HSC program. Data were collected by a structured native language questionnaire and

analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12.0 (SPSS, Inc. Willy, 2004). For all the outcomes, p value of 0.05 or less was considered indicating significance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Demographic Profile of Open School's Learners

Table 1 shows the composition of learners by the demographic status. The study showed that among the learners, 57.8% ($n=355$) were male and 42.2% ($n=259$) were female. The mean age of the respondents was $21.55 \pm \text{SD } 4.9$ years and ranged from 14 to 48 years. While the mean age of male learners was 21.61 years ($\text{SD} \pm 5.0$, 95% CI 21.1 to 22.1) and median age was 20 years and female learners was 21.47 years ($\text{SD} \pm 4.2$, 95% CI 21.0 to 22.0) and median age was 21 years. In the mean time, the mean age of SSC learner was 19.8 years ($\text{SD} \pm 4.0$, 95% CI 19.4 to 20.3), median age was 19 years and mean age of HSC learner was 23.3 years ($\text{SD} \pm 4.7$, 95% CI 22.8 to 23.8), median age was 22 years. The mean age of the SSC program was significantly lower than the learners of HSC program ($t = 9.92$; $df = 612$ and $p = 0.001$). It was found that 50.3% ($n=309$) of the learners were belongs to effective learning age group of below 20 years and 46.3% ($n=284$) of them were late learning age group i.e. 21 to 30 years. This is more or similar findings to the study of Valentine & Darkenwald (1990), MacBrayne (1995) and Johnstone and Rivera (1965), which showed that adult learners who choose to enroll in distance education programs, were aged of 18 and 40 years.

Table 1: Demographic Description of the Respondents

	Variable	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	355	57.8
	Female	259	42.2
Age Groups of Respondents	Effective Learning Age (< 20 Years)	309	50.3
	Late Learning Age (21 to 30 Years)	284	46.3
	Very Late Learning Age (> 30 Years)	21	3.4
Marital Status	Single	482	78.5
	Married /Divorced / Widowed	132	21.5
Religion	Muslim	514	83.7
	Hindus	77	12.5
	Christian	11	1.8
	Buddhist	12	2.0
Place of Residence	Urban	254	41.4
	Suburban	53	8.6
	Rural	307	50.0
Distance from Residence to SC	Minimum	1 km	
	Maximum	40 km	
	Mean	7.53 km	
Distance from Residence to RRC	Minimum	1 km	
	Maximum	150 km	
	Mean	34.85 km	
Total Monthly Family Income	Low-income Group (up to 5300 TK)	225	36.7
	Lower-middle-income Group (5301-20000)	358	58.3
	Upper-middle-income Group (20001-64500)	31	5.0
Total		614	100

In this study, 83.7% learners were Muslims, 12.5% were Hindus, 1.8% was Christian and 2.0% were Buddhist. The study also found that the majority 78.5% ($n=482$) of the learners were single.

This study showed that 50% of the learners were come from rural areas and 41.4% were come from urban areas where they were living. The learners of OS were travel on average 7.53 km (minimum 01 km and maximum 40 km) surroundings from the SC where the tutorial and practical sessions were

performed. Learners were resides on average 34.9 km from the RRC where most of the administrative jobs were performed for them. Learners of OS reside far away from the RRC then the learners of School of Science and Technology that is 25.9 KM (Numan et.al, 2010). In comparison to Malaysian study it was too far for the Bangladeshi learners, where most of the learners (89.2%) travel less than 100 KM to attend their learning centers (Raghavan and Kumar, 2007).

The study also expressed in the Table 2 that 79.5% of the learners were resides on average 10 kilometer distance from the SC. Among the learners of OS, 12.7% male learners were resides from 11 to 20 KM away from the study center where as 14.3% of the female learners. There was no significant difference between the male and female learners with the distance residing from the SC ($\chi^2=1.13$; df=3 and p=0.769).

Table 2: Learners residence distance from the SC by gender

Distance from SC	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1KM to 10 KM	283	79.7	205	79.1	488	79.5
11 KM to 20 KM	45	12.7	37	14.3	82	13.4
21 KM to 30 KM	16	4.5	8	3.1	24	3.8
31 KM to 40 KM	11	3.1	9	3.5	20	3.3
Total	355	100.0	259	100.0	614	100.0

As per the classification (The Daily Star, March 15, 2009), countries which have \$905 or less per capita GNI are low-income, from \$906-\$3,595 are lower-middle-income, from \$3,596-11,115 are upper middle-income and \$11,116 or more are high-income group. The mean total monthly family income of the learners of OS was TK9578 (95% CI 8934 to 10222). According to table 3 the total monthly family income of male learners were higher in low-income group then female learners whereas it was reverse in the lower-middle-income group. There was a significant difference between the income group of male and female learners of OS ($\chi^2=11.71$; df=2 and p=0.003).

Table 3: Learners Total Monthly Family Income by Gender

Income Group	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Low-income Group (up to 5300 TK)	140	39.5	85	32.8	225	36.6
Lower-middle-income Group (5301-20000)	190	53.5	168	64.9	358	58.3
Upper-middle-income Group (20001-64500)	25	7.0	6	2.3	31	5.1
Total	355	100.0	259	100.0	614	100.0

2. Learners Opinion on BOU's TV Program Time Schedule

Broadcasting by TV is a popular means of communication in distance teaching system because of its universal accessibility. By watching educational TV program learners get necessary knowledge and information about their courses. Table 4 showed that 41.8% (n=130) of the male and 24.9% (n=56) female learners desire to watch BOU's TV program at morning schedule on 6am to 12 noon. Whereas the desire to watch TV program at noon schedule (12 noon to 6 pm) was reversed among male and female learners. Moreover the desire to watch TV program at night schedule (8am to 11 pm) was higher among male learners (29.3%) than female (16.0%). Significant difference were found among the male and female learners of OS regarding the time schedule of TV program ($\chi^2=68.06$; df=4 and p=0.000).

This study also expressed that 70.2% of the learners watched TV program offered for them and 83.1% of them gave their opinion that BOU TV Program should be enjoyable and informative.

Table 4: Learners desire time schedule of TV program by Gender

Time Schedule	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%

Morning (6am-9am)	82	26.4	39	17.3	121	22.6
Morning (9am-12am)	48	15.4	17	7.6	65	12.1
Noon (12am-6pm)	48	15.4	107	47.6	155	28.9
Evening (6pm-8pm)	42	13.5	26	11.5	68	12.7
Night (8pm-11pm)	91	29.3	36	16.0	127	23.7
Total	311	100.0	225	100.0	536	100.0

3. Does TV Program is effective to Solve the Course Material?

Studies suggested that people learn and retain 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they say, and 90% of what they experience directly or practice doing (Date, 1977). The educational media programs offered by BOU through audio-visual media have been one-way traffic such as only 'see and hear'. Most of the important and difficult/critical lessons of OS's courses have been discussed into the audio-visual program. Concerned tutors or teachers have chosen the important text or add some visual/graphical aids from the specific lesson on priority basis. BOU learners' have well informed about the audio-visual program which would broadcast through radio and TV. Figure 1 shows that 85.8% of male and 91.4% of female learners opined that BOU's TV program were effective to solve the critical queries of their course materials.

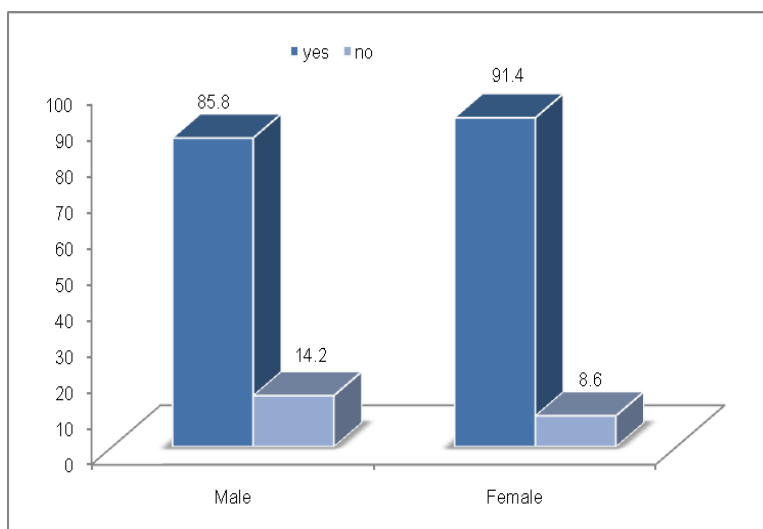


Fig 1: % distribution of effectiveness of TV Program

4. Learners Attitudes towards Support Services Provided by BOU

The success of distance education system depends on the quality of learner support services. Figure 2 shows that 46.1%, 42.8% and 45.4% of the learners of OS were expressed that the quality of RRC, LC and SC services was good respectively whereas 31.8%, 33.7% and 32.6% of the learners expressed that these were as average.

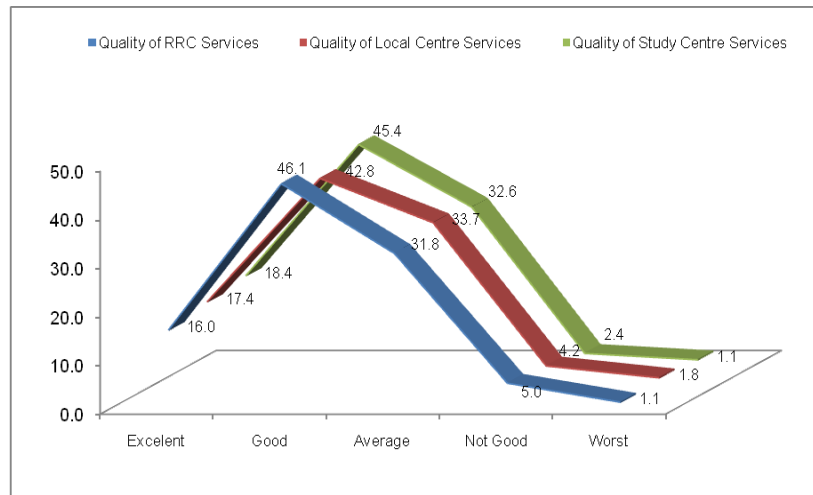


Figure 2: Attitudes Regarding BOU Services

5. Learners Opinion Regarding Group Discussion

Group discussion allows you to exchange information and ideas and gives you the experience of working in a team. Working in a group can be challenging, especially where the members are very diverse in age, cultural background, linguistic and academic ability, and preferred learning styles. However, when well-managed, groups can provide a valuable experience of the kind of collaboration required in the professional workplace. Figure 3 shows that 33% of male and 36.7% of female learners were express that group discussion has very important to understanding the learning process whereas 45.6% of male and 43.2% of female learners express that it has important to group discussion for better understanding of learning process. Moreover nearly one fifth of the learners of OS did not aware regarding group discussion.

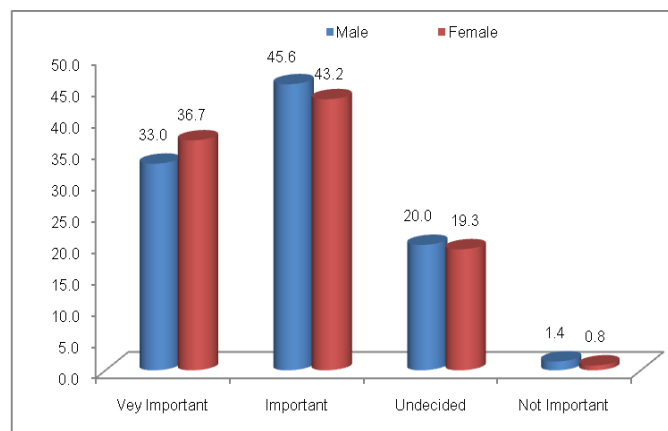


Figure 3: % distribution regarding group discussion

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have important implications for development of the program and it would be used as a basis for improving programs regarding learner support services at BOU. To strengthen the existing program of OS and to maintain quality education, following recommendation should be suggested:

- There should be strong coordination between learners and academic staff.
- Printing text materials should be self instructional, activity based and more learner-oriented.

- Audio-visual program which broadcasting by BOU media center should be more attractive and interactive.
- BOU can rethink about the on-air timetable of the TV program and at this point further more survey should be needed.
- The attitude of the Learner Support Services should be always positive towards the learners and should be more active to promote this program.
- More research should be done in this area to get ideas of the learners, tutors and administrative staff.

BOU need to investigate on above issues and should try to set an inexpensive strategy to meet new challenges which will help achieving BOU objectives.

CONCLUSION

Learners of OS of BOU have the scope to get education anywhere, either at home or in any place and in any situation. The mean age of the learners were 21.55 years, among them 57.8% were male, 83.7% were Muslim and 50% of them were resides in rural area. And 58.3% of the learners belong to the lower-middle-income group population. They have taken their education by using text materials provided by OS. Among the learners 88.4% opined that BOU's TV program was effective to solve the problem of the text materials. Near about 80% of the learners stated that group discussion is very much effective for better understanding of their learning process. More than 70% of the learners expressed that the quality of RRC, LC and SC services were up to the mark. We were expecting that the findings of this study would give some valuable information from the learners for the policy maker and future researchers.

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